Study abroad as governmentality: The construction of hypermobile subjectivities in higher education.

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Drawing on the concept of hypermobility, the paper examines a case of study-abroad mobility from a governmentality perspective. Based on a critical analysis of policy texts and interviews with Irish students who have taken part in the Erasmus exchange programme, it argues that under the conditions of neoliberal globalisation, the normalisation of study abroad aims to produce self-governing practices that align with dominant discourses promoting voluntarist attitudes to labour mobility. These dispositions, described as hypermobility, are an additional dimension of the flexible, entrepreneurial subject imagined in neoliberal societies. The paper examines the discourses and practices at state and institutional levels and how they circulate and impact on students' subjectivities – analysing affective detachment from home and cosmopolitan sociability as self-disciplining practices that align with the production of neoliberal hypermobile subjectivities.

Governmentality; Higher Education; Hypermobility; Student mobility; Neoliberalism

Introduction

The European Union stated that by 2010, 20 percent of European students should have an experience abroad (Council of the European Union 2011). Under the Erasmus umbrella, a number of programmes enable young people to spend time (typically one academic semester or year) in one of 28 EU and 5 non-EU 'programme countries'

during their studies.[1] Since its inception in 1987, the policy rationale of the programme has shifted from European citizenship and cultural and academic development to skill acquisition and the reduction of graduate unemployment. It has expanded across the education 'continuum' to include students in vocational and secondary education (Dvir and Yemini 2017). Shorter study periods and work placements have also been introduced in order to increase the participation of less privileged students. Once an elite strategy, available for the most advantaged to take up should they wish to do so, international mobility for studies is increasingly becoming the norm, encouraged by states and universities, as a way to enhance employability, labour mobility and economic competitiveness.

This dramatic expansion,[2] orchestrated by transnational agencies, states and higher education institutions alike, raises at least two questions. First, arguably the value of 'international capital' (e.g. credentials, networks, knowledge) acquired through cross-border mobility owes to the fact it is only accessible to a select few (Friedman 2017, XX 2018a). We may therefore wonder what benefits individuals can derive from a positional good that is becoming increasingly accessible and normalised. Secondly, we need to analyse this phenomenon in the context of the neoliberal rationality in higher education. In particular, what does it mean in terms of governmentality and the constitution of neoliberal subjectivities through education?

Self-reliance, responsibility, entrepreneurialism, flexibility and 'agility' have been identified in education policy as technologies of government, aiming to craft the

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[1] 'Partner' countries outside the region have also been recently added for some specific exchange programmes at postgraduate level.

[2] Over 300,000 EU students take part in Erasmus programmes each year. The European Commission aims to double the budget allocated to Erasmus in the next funding phase, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-3948_en.htm

ideal subject for the neoliberal society (Ball 2009; Gillies 2011; Peters 2001). Outward student mobility is another dimension of higher education that may be analysed from this perspective. It is understood that a neoliberal narrative focussed on the figure of the 'entrepreneurial student' dominates student mobility policies and that it has replaced the 'European citizenship' discourse that underpinned the Erasmus exchange programme as it was originally shaped (Haapakoski and Pashby 2017). Despite this acknowledgement, literature on student mobility tends to take the standpoint of self-formation or strategies of social reproduction (e.g. Marginson 2014; Waters 2006). The role of outward student mobility in crafting, specifically, the *hypermobile* neoliberal subject, defined here as one that is voluntarily mobile geographically in response to the needs of global capitalism (in addition to being flexible, entrepreneurial and 'agile'), has received little attention. The policy rationales for student mobility are diverse and include those briefly outlined above, but the article focusses specifically on a yet unexplored aspect: hypermobility as an emerging imperative in the neoliberal governance of higher education, and as another facet of the neoliberal subject.

The paper draws primarily from documentary analysis and interviews with Irish students. It analyses the promotion of Erasmus at European, national and institutional level as an exercise in governmentality that aims to foster hypermobile neoliberal subjectivities. As part of this endeavour, it examines not only the discourses and practices subjects are confronted with but also how these produce self-governing practices and dispositions suitable to future (hyper)mobility.

To use governmentality as a conceptual tool is to deconstruct the normatively accepted accounts emanating from the state, as well as uncovering their effects on subjects (Schwiter 2013). Therefore the article proceeds as follows: the first section

draws on literature on neoliberal governmentality in education and mobility studies to chart the political rationality of student mobility. The paper then focusses on Ireland as a case-study, examining manifestations of the emerging governmentality of international mobility at the level of the state (section 2), universities (section 3), and subjects (section 4). The final section discusses the tensions, resistances and incompleteness of these processes.

Study abroad as neoliberal governmentality

A growing body of literature explores the student/migration nexus and/or the connection between student mobility and labour mobility over the life-course. This literature suggests that mobile students from wealthier countries, such as those participating in Erasmus, are more likely to engage in further mobility for work compared to their static peers (King and Ruiz-Gelices 2011; Parey and Waldinger 2011). It has been argued that aspirations for international mobility are the product of family socialisation and influence self-selection into exchange programmes (Bozionelos et al. 2015). However, some researchers have convincingly argued that the experience of student mobility amplifies and even creates desires for unlimited mobility over the life-course. Thus Findlay et al. (2017) suggest that mobile students' desires for onward (rather than circular) mobility are tied to aspirations for international, indefinitely mobile careers. Collins et al. (2016) argue that when the 'portability' of international education is limited in practice, graduates continue to harbour such desires for their children, pointing to the enduring nature of mobility desires and their imagined association with individual and transgenerational social mobility. The appeal of the great 'global cities' of the Anglophone world is also discernible in the accounts presented in these studies,

indicating that ‘neoliberal imaginaries of globalisation’ (Rizvi 2011) are at play in students’ representations.

Shifting the focus from individual to state and institutional strategies, other researchers have examined how international education policies and practices may be used to manage graduates’ expectations, and graduates themselves. The case of the Philippines, where the education system trains and exports students for the global low-wage economy (Ortiga 2017) or South Korea, which uses study abroad to send away its undesirable/unemployable surplus of non-elite future graduates (Kim 2017) both point to the role of the state in engineering outward student mobility for the purpose of national economic and political stability and/or to service the global economy. Indeed, as argued by Collins and colleagues, mobilities ‘can be moulded by states, families, and students … embedded in geopolitical and geo-economic relations and the strategies that seek to influence them’. Students thus become ‘subjects of neoliberalising and globalising projects’ whose desires need to be adequately governmentalised by states and higher education institutions (Collins et al. 2014, 673). In other words, students exercise agency in their mobility choices; but are also animated, and set in motion, by external forces.

In neoliberalism, the state seeks to create enterprising and competitive individuals (Olssen and Peters 2005). Foucault developed the concept of governmentality to describe the technologies of control used by states to conduct behaviours and produce such individuals. Governmentality, a decentralised form of power that relies on the internalisation of norms of behaviour rather than on coercion, emanates from the state but is channelled through myriads of institutions and subjects themselves. In turn, individuals internalise the rationality of neo-liberalism (as what is

good/desirable, what it takes to be happy/successful) and develop 'technologies of the self' that lead them to conduct their own behaviours accordingly (Rose 1990). In the context of neoliberal capitalism, these self-disciplinary practices help produce the ideal neoliberal subject, one that is rational, competitive, entrepreneurial, self-reliant and responsible: 'the entrepreneur of himself, being for himself the source of [his] earnings' (Foucault 2008, 226). These technologies of power exercised by states, institutions and subjects become undistinguishable from the voluntary self-disciplining mechanisms through which individuals achieve conformity with neoliberal values (Foucault 1991; Rose 1990). Thus, the neoliberal imperatives of self-reliance and entrepreneurialism become understood as freedom, as a personal choice for one's own benefit.

Education is one of the sites where governmentality is exercised, as demonstrated notably by Ball (e.g. 1990). The values of self-reliance, responsibility, entrepreneurialism, flexibility and 'agility' pervade higher education policy (Ball 2009; Gillies, 2011; Mitchell 2006; Peters 2001). The ideology of lifelong learning, for instance, makes individuals solely responsible for their own 'employability' and promotes 'a downgrading of social rights within any particular national territory' (Olssen 2008, 39). In other words, it makes each individual responsible for their own circumstances, discourages graduates from expecting well-paid work on the basis of their credentials alone, and assumes that neither the state nor employers are responsible for guaranteeing fair working conditions and welfare for all. In a sense, through the governmentality at play in education policy, neoliberal subjectivities are shaped in a way that anticipates the likelihood of precarious employment. The pervasive discourse of global competition and accelerated technological change contributes to normalising unpredictable futures: Our societies are now characterised by 'a condition of instability, precariousness, and risk' that creates significant anxiety and requires individuals,

including students, to constantly seek new ways to adapt and compete with others for survival (De Lissovoy 2017, 5). In this context, the discourses of flexibility and agility present as a necessity the individual capacity to adapt, reinvent oneself and move across sectors (or borders) according to the needs of the economy (Gillies 2011; Peters 2001; Ortiga 2017). In order to be successful, the individual needs to be constantly in motion, both figuratively and literally.

The need for voluntarist attitudes to mobility is discernible in education policy, where geographical, psychological and social stasis are conflated as the cause for the deficit in 'aspiration' of underprivileged youths (Spohrer, Stahl and Bowers-Brown 2017). De Lissovoy (2017) emphasises 'hypermobility of the subject' (meant primarily as a psychological resource) as a necessary condition under neoliberalism. In policy aimed at increasing cross-border student flows, this willingness to put individuals in circulation, literally, is explicit. International mobility is presented as a way to equip students with the skills, credentials and dispositions (adaptability, flexibility, autonomy, risk-taking) necessary to be deemed employable (Sidhu 2006, 308). This promise of increased employability resonates with the discourse of the 'global war for talent' (Brown and Tannock 2009); as well as with glamorised representations of globally mobile professional elites (Birtchnell and Caletrio 2014; Cohen and Gössling 2015; Devadason 2017). Under neoliberal capitalism, the ideal workers should be unattached, movable and voluntarily mobile; no longer tied to an employer, a sector of employment or a state; and thus further disconnected from the social welfare and labour regulations typically defined within national borders. In many ways, the discourse of student mobility converges with that of flexibility and entrepreneurialism, by treating as obsolete expectations of stability and security and by framing individuals as self-reliant,

dis-embedded and ‘free’ (in fact, expected) to relocate as required or desired in the global labour market.

It is therefore useful to consider how ‘hypermobility’ may participate in the construction of neoliberal subjectivities in higher education. In the field of geography, hypermobility may be understood as frequent travel, particularly over long distances (Cohen and Gössling 2015). Here, looking at students engaged in structured (one-off, circular) mobility programmes, hypermobility is understood as a disposition rather than a reality, an aspiration to (or anticipation of) unlimited geographic mobility over the life-course that is compatible with the real or imagined needs of global capitalism, and with the ideal of the self-reliant, enterprising and flexible neoliberal subject.

The governmentality of mobility for studies and work in Ireland: managing graduate expectations?

Irish higher education policy largely reflects the discourse of neoliberalism and as such plays a role in the transmission of its values (Lynch 2006). This dominant discourse disavows aspirations for employment stability and linear career trajectories and presents unpredictable futures as the norm. The main employers’ confederation asserted that graduates will have ‘an average of 10-12 jobs by the time they reach the age of 38’ (IBEC 2015), a message echoed uncritically by the Higher Education Authority (HEA):

> The fast-paced world we now live in is a recurring theme, and the need for education and training to prepare people throughout their lives to adapt and master new knowledge, new skills, to having several changes in career during their lifetime (HEA 2015, 7).

The entrepreneurship discourse is also pervasive in higher education policy. It exhorts graduates to be 'job shapers and not just job seekers' (DES 2011, 37), thus framing employment (and associated statutory entitlements and rights) as outdated.

Similarly the discourse of economic globalisation and competitiveness is mobilised as the main rationale for the internationalisation of Irish higher education (see for instance DES 2016, 5). Outgoing student mobility is only very briefly discussed in these documents because the focus is on incoming mobility for revenue and soft power – as was the case until recently in the UK (Brooks, Waters and Pimlott-Wilson 2012). However, the HEA has set quantitative targets for each institution in terms of outgoing mobility; guidance counsellors are now encouraged to advise second-level students on colleges abroad; and the promotion of Erasmus, as an individualised strategy to acquire 'global credentials', as accelerated::

> Employers, in our increasingly internationalised job market, are increasingly on the lookout for graduates who have a demonstrated ability to succeed in an international environment. What better way to demonstrate your global credentials than study abroad in one of Europe's top universities? (Eurireland website). [3]

As it is only a recent manifestation, the genealogy of this emerging governmentality of mobility is difficult to trace within Irish higher education policy. However, it broadly coincides with an acceleration of neoliberal capitalism in the aftermath of the economic crisis, which caused record levels of graduate unemployment and unprecedented youth emigration (McEinri et al. 2013). In the aftermath of the crisis, youth emigration was labelled a 'curse' and a 'scourge' in the media, with comparisons drawn with previous historical episodes of mass emigration (White and Gilmartin 2013). The 'We're not

[3] http://eurireland.ie/i-am-a/erasmus-student/study-periods/, last accessed in September 2018.

Leaving' campaign group, launched in 2013, argued that youth emigration was orchestrated by the Irish government in order to prevent young people from organising against austerity (Mannion 2014).

In response, the Irish government portrayed youth emigration as a lifestyle choice and an expression of freedom (see examples in Glynn, Kelly and MacÉinri, 89-90) while emphasising the economic and strategic value of the Irish diaspora to the country (XX 2016). Graduate emigration was not framed as a problem to be solved; rather, its negative perception was framed as the problem. Not only government discourses but also academic scholarship emphasised the fluidity of contemporary youth migration from Ireland and its positive impacts on individuals (e.g. Moriarty et al. 2015). Once a recurring theme in literature and film, the image of the reluctant Irish migrant driven out by crushing poverty was gradually overshadowed by new cultural configurations of the Irish migrant as a self-determined and successful global worker (O'Leary and Negra 2016). Individualistic forms of international mobility, framed in terms of lifestyle choice or career-building strategies – and thus aligned with neoliberal global imaginaries – have gained visibility and legitimacy in political, media and scholarly discourse.

Ireland is characterised as a polarised economy with a substantial low-wage sector (Wickham 2017) and despite the partial economic recovery, graduate underemployment remains high (Green and Henseke 2016). Unlike the Philippines (Ortiga 2017). South Korea (Kim 2018) and other 'sending states' with more discernible labour exporting policies (Lee 2017), Ireland may not (or may no longer) seek to export its graduates indefinitely. The promotion of international mobility may therefore be understood as a technology of control, aimed to foster voluntary attitudes to mobility;

and thus to legitimate decreasing wages and downgraded conditions for those who have failed to become adequately (hyper)mobile.

The research: student mobility from Ireland as a case study

Governmentality scholars argue that discourses and practices become internalised on the level of the self. The neoliberal rationality becomes incorporated into subjectivities, shaping how people understand and conduct themselves (neoliberal subjectivation). They also acknowledge that these processes may be only partly successful, creating tensions (e.g. anxiety and feelings of inadequacy in individuals) and contestation: governmental projects do not always meet their ends for 'discursive intent does not make the world' (Bærenholdt 2013, 30). In the context of the present study, it is not expected that students will internalise the ideal of neoliberal hypermobility seamlessly or that all will embark (or seek to embark) on hypermobile careers and lifestyles. As suggested by Schwiter, it is useful not only to analyse the discourses and practices individuals are confronted with, and the strategies they deploy to adapt to or contest these, but also to '[analyse] neoliberalism to where is has been internalised and normalised as "neoliberal subjectivity" … [by looking] directly at how subjects understand themselves' (2013, 154). Therefore, while it remains important to analyse the discourses produced by the state and its institutions, the accounts of students undertaking exchange, at a time when it is becoming established as an imperative, provide a useful portal to understand how the discourse of global mobility is circulated and what role it plays in crafting hypermobile subjectivities and voluntary attitudes to labour mobility.

The next three sections draw mainly on interview material. The paper emerged from a broader research project which examined the motivations and experiences of

Irish students in relation to international mobility.[4] It involved an anonymous mixed-methods questionnaire (N=110) and 22 in-depth qualitative interviews with Irish students returning from an exchange programme. Ten members of university staff involved in the daily management of outgoing students were also interviewed. In addition, policy documents, websites and brochures were examined and 'information sessions' held by international offices were observed as well as various events (such as study abroad fairs) organised within and outside universities. Student participants were recruited from Ireland's seven universities and across a range of disciplines and destinations. They were asked about their motivations, representations of mobility, choice of destination, family backgrounds, previous international experiences, experiences abroad and career aspirations. There is a strong normative expectation for students to be positive about their experience abroad (Petzold and Peter 2015); this may make tensions difficult to discern. The in-depth nature of the interviews allowed alternative narratives to emerge, in which tensions and instances of 'work on the self' became discernible.

The participants came from a range of upper working-class to middle-class backgrounds. Overall, the sample was not as distinctly privileged compared to what emerged from other studies of European exchange students (e.g. Netz and Finger 2016). These are not the 'elite' students likely to be recruited from elite universities into international elite careers (Brown and Tannock 2009). Typically, exchange students have previously acquired international capital (Netz and Finger 2016). The sample is also original in that 59 percent of interview respondents declared they spoke no foreign language or only at a basic level; and 45 percent of interviewees had never spent more

[4] The project received full ethical approval from [XY] and all participants were de-identified in order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

than two weeks outside the country before their year abroad (one had never left Ireland). The sample thus included participants with little or no 'international capital' and therefore more likely, perhaps, to be unsettled by the governmentality of mobility.

The empirical material was analysed using a Foucauldian discourse perspective that examined the 'truths' produced about student mobility, and was attentive to the context in which these truths were produced (Fairclough 1992; Hall 2001). Foucault argues that subjectivity is produced discursively: it is through discourse that individuals, as both subjects and objects of governmentality, construct 'truths' about themselves. Therefore, particular attention was paid to instances where compliance with the ideal of the hypermobile neoliberal subject became visible: where students' narratives reproduced discursive elements identified in policy, where they attempted to reconcile these with their lived experiences of mobility, where they expressed the necessity of 'work on the self' to comply. Rather than assuming an actual transformation (as in a 'before/after' situation), the analysis focused on the discursive production of the self, aiming to discern what students had internalised from the dominant discourse. It is worth noting that the identified patterns were not present in all interviews; and that other themes and discourses also emerged from the analysis: [5] The paper does not claim that neoliberal hypermobility is the only discourse that students engage with; but it deliberately focuses on this aspect.

Institutional promotion of study abroad: creating a culture of mobility

The more privileged Irish students have always travelled to escape an education system viewed as parochial (O'Neill 2014; XX 2018b) and although no comprehensive

[5] Available in XX.

research exists on degree mobility, anecdotal evidence – such as steady number of Irish applications to Oxbridge and the recruitment campaigns of Eastern-European medical colleges in Ireland – suggests that degree mobility (i.e. mobility for a whole degree, taking place outside institutional partnerships) is indeed used as a privileged strategy by a number of Irish students who bypass the Irish higher education system entirely.[6] In terms of institutionalised mobility for credit (i.e. students registered at an Irish university and taking a term or year abroad), a number of highly selective non-EU exchange programmes are also in existence. While serving the 'global ambitions' of Irish universities, in practice these prestigious partnerships only make a small, non-expandable number of places available to Irish students (XX 2018c). By contrast, as one of two English-speaking countries within the EU, Ireland receives greater numbers of Erasmus students than it sends out and its institutions have no difficulty in establishing partnerships with other EU institutions. Therefore, while non-EU exchange programmes serve primarily institutional branding strategies, facilitating the privileged strategies of a select few, the Erasmus programme makes it possible to target larger numbers of students.[7] This expansion 'from above' thus concerns a much broader segment of the student body, not just a small self-selected elite.

As universities are under pressure from the HEA to increase outgoing numbers, they have become more active in their promotion of mobility. One university has made participation in Erasmus mandatory on a range of courses across Humanities and Social Sciences – disciplines often construed as producing less employable students – even for

[6] See also Donnelly and Gamsu (2018) on student mobility from Northern Ireland to England.

[7] See also XX 2018d for a distinction between 'mass participation', 'elite', 'gap year' and 'original Erasmus' models of student mobility programmes in Irish higher education institutions, where it is argued that the current expansion of Erasmus mobility primarily serves the goal of 'mass participation'.

students who do not study a foreign language or have no particular interest in going abroad (XX 2018 c). Other institutions have introduced less coercive formulae, such as the option to turn a three-year degree into a four-year 'international' degree with a year abroad as an add-on assessed on a pass/fail basis.

At university events where exchange is promoted, various discursive strategies are deployed. Lifestyle and self-development are central but the discourse of global competitiveness and human capital is also very much present. In particular, the year abroad is presented as a valuable distinguishing feature on a graduate CV, a way to demonstrate a range of skills and dispositions to potential employers. At one such event, the reasons to go on exchange were presented as follows:

> Opportunity to study at some of the best opportunities in the world.
> Chance to spend time abroad while earning credits.
> Improving and learning a language.
> Experience.
> Take new/different/more specialised courses.
> Sets CV apart from other applicants.
> International experience.
> Possibility of work experience/internship.
> Opportunity to live away from home.
> Extra-curricular activities.
> Multi-cultural experience.
> Fun.
> Friendship.
> Travel.
> Weather! ('Why go on exchange?' Powerpoint presentation at university event).

Students are thus encouraged to engage in international mobility in order to acquire new skills (languages), specialisms (specialised courses) and that elusive 'experience' that will 'set [their] CVs apart' – enhance their personal portfolios. In parallel, the emphasis

on lifestyle ('Fun. Friendship. Travel. Weather!') plays into the representation of students as privileged consumers of mobility, obscuring the financial and emotional costs of the experience.

Attrition is a frustrating issue for staff in charge of organising exchange. Staff pointed to financial issues; but also to individual failings of a more psychological nature: lack of organisation skills, poor money management, narrow-mindedness, parochialism or immaturity (in one case, overprotective 'Irish mammies' were blamed). The hypermobility discourse ignores and erases the class-based and ability differences as well as (often gendered) care responsibilities that shape our relationships to mobility (Ahmed 2012; Ong 1999; Urry 2002). These discourses lay the foundations for the hypermobile subject to emerge as a legitimate role-model, while barriers to mobility are psychologised and even ridiculed.

Students returning from exchange are hired by international offices to promote outgoing mobility. Whether in paid roles or as volunteers, these 'ambassadors' become active agents in the inter-relational promotion and normalisation of mobility. Some did so despite difficult experiences. At a promotional event, one (who was subsequently interviewed and revealed his mental health struggles), mentioned homesickness in passing but framed it as a rite of passage. This reinforces the normative expectation that students display enthusiasm about their experience (Petzold and Peter 2015). It is also an illustration of the multiple channels, and relationships, through which norms of behaviour circulate and technologies of control are effected, mobilising not only staff but also peers; pointing to the diffuse manner in which governmentality works to produce norms of behaviour.

Becoming hypermobile: The year abroad and the normalisation of international mobility

Affective emancipation

Students unravelled various narratives of the self in the course of the interviews. To my question about the reasons why he went abroad, one immediately answered that he had always had a notoriously independent character. Another, Ronan, argued that the experience taught him to be mobile, while he had been an anxious traveller in the past. Ronan thus presented a new self-identity, as a free-mover unconstrained by the anxieties of his previous static self. Both students presented themselves as perfectly aligned with the ideal of the autonomous and potentially hypermobile subject: one as inherently so, and the other as having acquired this specific aptitude and disposition through voluntary exposure. Ronan in particular referred to his newly acquired ease of mobility on several occasions, contrasting it with the immobility of other Irish people:

> The view I gained was to have a perspective of being able to move easily. I mean people in Spain and Italy, they have a very different view of travelling I find. They have no problem hopping on a plane – they go like we go there, we go there! And they have no problem. In Ireland they're like oh I don't think we can go…everyone is much more attached to their country (Ronan, interview).

Ronan perceives his fellow citizens as less mobile than other Europeans, as if attachment to their home country was a kind of national pathology – a perception perhaps influenced by the stereotypical view of Ireland as parochial, but which also marks his dissociation from the image of the reluctant emigrant forced abroad by economic necessity.[8] His subjectivity aligns with the dominant discourse framing

[8] This discursive dissociation from 'previous waves' is discernible in the way recent Irish migrants 'make sense' of their mobility decisions (Ryan 2015)

geographic mobility as freedom and entrepreneurialism, rather than with the counter-discourse produced for instance by the 'We're not leaving' campaign. Other students described their home university, town or country, as 'too small' or 'entrapping'. In this sense as well, students aligned themselves with the discourse of mobility as emancipatory and movement as an expression of freedom.

With the mobility imperative, material, religious or affective attachments become illegitimate (Mincke 2013). In their accounts, students were not only critical of their peers who had stayed behind, but also of those who had not sufficiently cut off affective ties with home. According to this unspoken rule, choosing a destination where one has family or originates from is considered cheating:

> There's a student in our class from Poland who decided to go to Poland on her Erasmus [laughs] which I don't know - I thought it was a bit of a cop out! (Tom, interview).

Tom's classmate failed to dis-embed themselves to the extent required and in this sense, was considered less worthy or successful. To some extent, detachment needs to be self-imposed. Another implicit 'rule' that emerged dictates that one should not go home too often:

> Some didn't really detach from Ireland, saw it maybe as a holiday … They still enjoyed it, but they certainly did feel more homesick … Interestingly enough, I don't know if it was related but those people were those who missed their parents most as well. Maybe it was the whole thing that they were more attached to Ireland (Claire, interview).

Homesickness is considered a weakness and is interpreted as a failure to physically and emotionally 'detach' from Ireland. These 'rules', internalised and enforced by students themselves, can be seen as both indicative and constitutive of the governmentality of

mobility. Attachment to Ireland, to family or romantic partners, is constructed as illegitimate:

> I never found myself homesick; some of my friends definitely experienced feeling homesick. One thing I found was anyone who had say a boyfriend at home found it much harder (Claire, interview).

> Like another one of my friends … and she didn't go because she had a boyfriend. I was like how stupid is this decision – she is not even going out with him anymore, and what is nine months in your life (Judy, interview).

Like other barriers to mobility aspirations, desires for continuity and affective security (a long-term partner) are devalued. Students who stayed behind are sometimes described as 'home-birds' and this character trait is often associated with excessive, child-like attachment to a parent:

> I have one and she's just such a home-bird … she calls her mum every day and not just like hi mum bye mum; she'd be on the phone everyday … She goes home every weekend. She's lovely and I'd say she'd love to travel but she would only travel if she could go home every week (Sarah, interview).

In the imaginary of hypermobility, transnational workers are expected to relocate at will, irrespective of family commitments and attachments. The issue, or flaw constructed in these students' discourses, is a reluctance to be mobile, coupled with an excessive attachment to home – echoing the comment of a staff member about 'Irish mammies'.[9] Those who returned home early were speculated to have failed, in some way, to adapt to change (and were also treated as problematic by the sending institution, as no alternative was in place).

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[9] This appeared to be gendered as well as immobile male students were more likely to be described as 'set in their ways' or perhaps 'narrow-minded', while female students were the ones described as too emotionally attached to their mothers or boyfriends.

Some students suggested that learning to be detached was a gradual, arduous process. For example, Denis explained he chose to go to a local university after his secondary schooling because he was introverted and the bigger universities intimidated him. Going on Erasmus represented a big step for him. In the course of his year abroad, he experienced isolation, homesickness and had an episode of depression. Denis described the efforts he made to find new activities, interests and connections. He has since happily volunteered to promote Erasmus to other students for 'if I did it, anyone can do it'. In this particular case, the year abroad is presented as an incentive to deploy self-disciplining practices characteristic of neoliberal subjectivation. These are interpreted as self-realisation, as finally 'coming out of [one's] shell' (Denis). This re-fashioned identity also aligns with perceptions of what constitutes an autonomous, employable individual:

> That was one of the reasons that made me go abroad. Like I'm doing an arts degree, which is kind of a dime a dozen like this, I wanted something that made me look different; the study abroad definitely shows your willingness to go out there and do something different … it shows that you're flexible; that you can adapt to unfamiliar surroundings; that you don't mind change; all these things that businesses look for (Denis, interview).

Denis thus presents a self-concept that incorporates voluntary mobility in addition to (and as evidence of) other attributes of the 'entrepreneur of the self'. Another student, Eoin, explained that he made a conscious decision to change both his routine and attitude after a difficult first term which led him to consider dropping out. He took pride in this achievement and felt more confident about his ability to be mobile in future:

> I'd have no problem going to live abroad after doing it once. I feel if I got through that first semester I can get through anything (Eoin, interview).

These narratives of 'passing the test' of mobility – overcoming the emotional and practical difficulties of the year abroad through efficient self-disciplining – enable the emergence of a new self-concept, in which the self is discursively reconstructed as less vulnerable, and more successful. This new identity is eminently compatible with self-reliance and individualist decision-making, experienced as freedom but nonetheless aligned with the rationality of neoliberalism.

Portable cosmopolitan sociability and self-reliance

From the airport to the youth hostel, from residence halls to classrooms, from Erasmus gatherings to the local Irish pub or sports club, making friends is disconcertingly easy during the year abroad. These friendships, no matter how new and transient, are presented as reliable and supportive:

> My group of friends – it changed, my friends changed from the first to the second semester because as I said it was only English-speaking students that kind of stayed around for the year but everyone was very supportive. Like you talk about being homesick they go like oh yeah so are we, they look out for you a bit more, like you know oh do you want to come over to mine tonight if they know you're not doing anything so it's nice, you do set up a nice little community among international students which is something that's really special and really nice (Darren, interview).

This 'community' brought together by circumstances and commonalities (age, international student status, social class) provides a temporary alternative to the stronger bonds they may have with parents, siblings and close friends at home. Through snowballing, students become acquainted with diverse overlapping or separate circles of friends. These are often described as core groups and larger groups; they are fluid, constantly evolving and never mutually exclusive. Students such as Darren present themselves as appreciative of a loose form of cosmopolitan sociability, which is in

constant flux, and supported by new technologies (Skype, Facebook, etc.). As suggested by Gomes (2015), this may bring students to the realisation that they can easily replace friendships and that constituting new social circles when relocating abroad is a relatively easy and painless process. It also participates in the subjectivation process, whereby students construct a self-image that is compatible with imagined transnational lifestyles.

However, limitations were discernible in the experience reported by another student, Judy. Judy realised her new circle of friends was not as caring as her long-term friends in Ireland:

> Em – even like making friends and stuff. Just because I was used to having my own group of friends, my own support network and stuff. When I make friends – I made friends with this one group of people and because I was new, people didn't look out for me – I don't know, I expected more from them – like what I'd expect from my friends at home (Judy, interview).

Yet, Judy went on to explain that this realisation was also part of a learning process, making her more discerning and demanding in her choice of friends:

> Yeah less naïve, more open – and probably not as trusting as before because before I was ready to be friends with everyone and anyone you know, it didn't matter, whereas now I think I need a bit more – like more weighted decisions like who I spend my time with (Judy, interview).

In her account, Judy argues that she has learnt to embrace the inevitable superficiality and carelessness of new acquaintances, adopting a self-reliant approach to sociability and forsaking her conception of friendship as a support network associated with a static notion of home. This goes hand in hand with the discursive construction of a more self-reliant and successful self, able to navigate the uncertainty and emotional isolation associated with hypermobility.

As internationally mobile students come and go according to their programme structures or visa requirements, those who stay learn to adapt by viewing distance as easily overcome and international friendships as interchangeable. One student, Sarah, departed slightly from this dominant narrative. In her discourse, the circle of friends she constituted while on Erasmus was truly exceptional and attempting to repeat the experience by going to the same place again would prove disappointing:

> If I could go back with the same people I would but I think going back now, no – it would be weird to go back … but it would be weird to be back in that university and not having the same people studying in that university if that makes sense [Interviewer: How much did they count in your experience?] The people made it. If I didn't get on – obviously if they weren't there I would have made friends with other people and they probably would have been whatever, good friends but the people I met there, that was everything … My experience in [country] obviously was completely shaped by those people you know (Sarah, interview).

Sarah would rather start anew again and embrace the unknown. Seeking novelty by engaging in further mobility holds more promise than returning to the familiar. In this narrative, despite the apparent tension, ultimately stasis is constructed as an obstacle that has to be overcome, and constantly 'moving on' in the pursuit of better experiences becomes the most desirable option. Emotional ties and uncertainty about the future are thus discursively reconciled with the imperative of further mobility.

Hypermobile futures?

In some ways, the year abroad helps shape students into the neoliberal hypermobile subjects conjured up in national and European policy, at least on the surface – or, to be more precise, students know how to present as such. One student described how he weaved his year abroad (which, in his case, was an extended holiday) into a particularly 'selling' self-narrative of success and entrepreneurialism in a job interview. The need to

present as internationalised, flexible and adventurous in order to succeed on the job market is well understood. But to what extent are students willing to embrace unpredictable, potentially precarious, hypermobile futures?

Some interview participants detailed long lists of dream destinations for leisure or work experience and one was already on the move again when the interview took place. But criticisms of Ireland as too small or entrapping were also mitigated by expressions of patriotism, with two students in particular considering that the year abroad had made them love their country more. One of them expressed this view hesitantly, and almost apologetically, towards the end of the interview; while the other associated it with the entrepreneurial wish to 'promote' his country abroad – echoing the discourse of the state on the strategic uses of an adequately 'activated' diaspora. Overall, such 'counter-discourses' were hesitant and did not question the ideology of hypermobility.[10]

Before their year abroad, four students had aimed for national civil service careers. All four now aspired instead to international careers. Unlike the students in Findlay et al.'s paper (2017), it was not 'always the plan'. Eoin said that the year abroad had 'opened [his] eyes to other jobs … like working in business as a translator or stuff like that' – rather than becoming a state-school teacher as he originally envisaged. Having spent years building networks in Ireland with a view to establishing himself on the local political scene, Gerry was now thinking of going 'more the European route than the Irish route'. For his part, Tom had no idea what career he would embark on, but was adamant that he would move abroad again:

[10] This may be contrasted with researchers' criticism of EU policy for researchers' mobility, e.g. Sautier 2018, 150.

> I definitely think there's a longing to be working abroad in the long run. Like I don't really want to be here in two years – that's out of, I'm not saying I want to go to Australia or Canada like a lot of people but I'd like to work on the continent in Europe and I'd say a lot of that is because of Erasmus because it was really positive (Tom, interview).

These students were among those who had not travelled extensively or independently until their year abroad. This is not to say that other factors, influences and representations did not contribute to producing these desires. But as privileged consumers of mobility, Erasmus students have access to a range of services designed to minimise the practical and administrative burdens faced by less privileged or less desirable migrants. This protective environment contributes to making the year abroad a positive introduction to international mobility, which is likely to resonate with its glamorous representations in the dominant discourses. They are also more exposed to these positive discourses and representations of mobility as these circulate through institutions, international student societies and so forth.

Another student, Arthur, who had never left Ireland before, had also internalised a strong desire to be 'in circulation' (Collins et al. 2014, 673). In contrast to his more optimistic peers, despite having conducted adequate 'work on the self' through mobility, he was quite despondent about his chances of securing employment in Ireland and stated that his year abroad would make no difference:

> But the only kind of work I could get at the moment is bar work so I don't think it'd matter too greatly to them if I studied here or [abroad] or not so I don't know (Arthur, interview).

His longing for 'circulation' co-existed with negative views of the Irish job market and vague hopes that the situation might be better elsewhere. As others – although in his

case, by default - he had internalised a belief in the opportunities offered by the global labour market. It should be emphasised however that not all students viewed further mobility as a guarantee of success:

> I was just hoping to get a job here in Ireland because it's very hard to financially set yourself up to move abroad … it's good to establish myself here and get some experience. If I do decide to work abroad then I'll have something under my belt to work from (Sam, interview).

Sam does not envisage economic security as a likely consequence of mobility but rather as a prerequisite to it. Mobility is only possible from a place of security and professional stability; social capital is to be built at home first. This contrasts with the attraction of Asian students to the great Anglophone 'global cities' symbolic of the opportunities offered by the global economy (Collins et al. 2014). While undoubtedly other (more privileged?) Irish students have such aspirations, these did not emerge from the sample. Gerry, for his part, implied that international mobility is temporary and incompatible with professional and affective security:

> If you don't go now, years later when you have a job or you're kind of more settled down with a more permanent job or a spouse or something it would be a lot more difficult to go compared to now when you're 21 or something (Gerry, interview).

This resonates with the findings of Lolich and Lynch's (2016) study, also conducted in Ireland: while Irish students have acquired neoliberal subjectivities to some extent, future security and care remain important. Instead of travelling to follow employment opportunities, students preferred the idea of finding a job that would allow them to achieve security and to then travel on their own terms. Nonetheless, envisaging extensive periods of travel before settling down is also consistent with an acceptance of

extended instability and insecurity from youth into adulthood, and participates in the construction of success as individualised and self-motivated.

Transnational elite careers are often associated with multinationals, NGOs or diplomacy; instead, students who envisaged a career abroad cited the European Commission as the ideal future employer:

> European Union [laughs] Yeah! I don't know what sector yet, whether it will be economics or defence or whatever but the European Union (Paul, interview).

A European career is an international career, but it is limited to a relatively narrow geographical area, with the possibility of traveling back to Ireland within hours.[11] It also has a civil service element, offering career stability within an entity assumed big enough to make it possible. In a way, students' positive dispositions for mobility were mitigated by a longing for geographic, affective and employment stability, jarring with the ideal of the hypermobile subject following the flows of financial capital from one 'global city' to another. Nonetheless, they still understand geographic mobility as an individualised strategy, rather than one governed by global economic flows: as an expression of freedom rather than compliance.

Conclusion

Drawing on the Foucault's concept of governmentality and on the notion of hypermobility, the article has argued that student mobility programmes are harnessed to neoliberal reason, and in particular to the project of crafting hypermobile subjects. Ball (2009), Gillies (2011), Olssen (2008), Peters (2001) and others have shown that higher

[11] The interviews took place before the Brexit referendum. Ireland is not part of the UK; the mobility of Irish citizens to the rest of the EU will not affected by a hard Brexit. Free movement of Irish citizens to the UK predates the EU and is unlikely to be affected either.

education was increasingly preoccupied with the production of the flexible, self-reliant 'entrepreneur of the self' desired under neoliberal capitalism. The article argues that hypermobilty, defined as a disposition to be internationally mobile in response to the opportunities offered by - or the needs of - global capitalism, is another dimension of the ideal neoliberal subject, and one that is also fostered in higher education, through student mobility. Thus, the article contributes to the field of governmentality studies in education in three distinct ways: by focussing specifically on the issue of student mobility, so far neglected in the field; by looking beyond policy and institutional texts to students' experiences and representations of the self, thus encompassing manifestations of the governmentality of mobility on these different levels; and by complicating the figure of the entrepreneurial student through a focus on the hypermobility dimension. More broadly, the article contributes to the growing body of literature that examines student mobility and internationalisation policies critically rather than as progressive or benign phenomena (e.g. Friedman 2017; Haapakoski and Pashby, 2017).

Hypermobility makes imaginable a subject that would be indifferent to attacks on social rights within national borders, seeing it as their own responsibility to seek opportunities elsewhere or alternatively, to accept an 'immobility penalty' in the form of downgraded conditions at home. In this sense, student mobility and the ideology of hypermobility that underpins it can be understood as a technology of control that goes hand in hand with lifelong learning which, as explained by Olssen, 'enables the adaptability of workers in terms of their mobility within the workforce between businesses and countries' (2008). Also in the same way as lifelong learning, student mobility illustrates how 'educational and economic practices mutually condition and adapt to each other' (Olssen 2008). This is particularly relevant in the case of Ireland, a

‘knowledge economy’ with high rates of graduate underemployment, where the promotion of geographic mobility as an expression of individual freedom may help manage graduates’ expectations while erasing more critical narratives of economic emigration under austerity. Governmentality, therefore, offers a useful lens to understand why, and how, states and transnational agencies endeavour to put larger and larger numbers of future graduates in circulation.

The article has also deployed the concept of governmentality to examine how discourses on mobility circulate between the state, institutions and students. This revealed that through the discourses they produced on themselves, students endeavoured to craft themselves as hypermobile subjects. In particular, affective autonomy, detachment from support networks associated with a static notion of home, and a portable form of cosmopolitan sociability emerged as valuable facets of the students’ recrafted subjectivities, as well as self-disciplining practices. These attitudes and practices align with normative representations of what makes the international student (and global worker) a successful subject, further illustrating the continuity between hypermobile and neoliberal subjectivities.

However, governmental projects are not always complete (Collins et al. 2014; Schwiter 2013): the article stresses that while students have successfully internalised the need to present as ‘internationalised’ and voluntarily mobile, and mobilise various narratives of hypermobility and ‘entrepreneurialism of the self’ in order to do so, they do not entirely adhere to the idealised figure of the hypermobile transnational worker, and also understand that the elite hypermobile lifestyle is not accessible to all. In this study, the objects of this emerging governmentality are neither the future low-wage workers exported by the Philippines (Ortiga 2017) nor the voluntarily mobile, very

privileged British students in other studies (e.g. Brooks, Waters and Pimlott-Wilson 2012). They do not attend elite universities and are drawn from a diverse intermediary group, whose future in the 'global knowledge economy' is uncertain. Arguably their class positions (not 'elite' but still varied in this sample), gender (and other issues that emerged from the study but are not unpacked here) mediate the extent to which they can be effectively 'set in motion'. The article aimed at showing the pervasiveness of the hypermobility discourse, its connection with neoliberal imaginaries, and some of the ways it is channelled and expressed by individuals, but does not examine the full array of possibilities and how they are shaped by class and other factors. Arguably, the governmentality of mobility takes different shapes and draws on different discourses in other parts of the world. There is ample scope to interrogate other modalities of mobility policy through the lens of governmentality and thus to expand the field of transnational mobility and 'global middle class' studies.

Acknowledgements

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